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CAUSES OF LACK OF POLITICAL COHESION IN SOUTH AMERICA

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CAUSES OF THE LACK OF POLITICAL COHESION IN SPANISH AMERICA

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The most serious criticism which we can lay at the door of the Spanish American to-day is his lack of political cohesion. The border provinces are everlastingly rebelling against the decrees of the central government. One hundred years ago, when the Spanish colonies began to secure their independence, they either did not combine or else combining soon fell apart. We naturally wonder why, when they copied our Constitution they did not follow our example and recognize the strength that comes from union. The answer to this and to many other criticisms that may be made is to be found in the history of the Hispanic race and in the geographical conditions that exist in the southern continent.

In criticising South American habits of mind and political tendencies, one must remember that the moral and intellectual characteristics that form the soul of a people are developed in its past and represent a legitimate inheritance from its ancestors. For the motives of its conduct, one must look to its history.

Historically, the Hispanic race was led to develop individualistic rather than coöperative action. In the Middle Ages the forces at work in the peninsula were centrifugal rather than centripetal.

In 713 A.D. a small handful of brave mountaineers were almost the only inhabitants of the peninsula that were able to defy the Moorish conquerors. The process of the Christian re-conquest of Spain was so slow that it took nearly eight centuries for her to grow from the lonely, rocky fastness of Covadonga to the group of Christian kingdoms that embraced the entire peninsula. Dur-

ing these eight hundred years preceding the conquest of America, the Spaniards fought almost continuously against an ever present enemy. This developed a strong municipal spirit, for the towns on the frontier were in constant danger of attacks from the Moors and it was necessary to grant them very considerable powers. As the boundaries of Christian Spain extended southward, new cities came to be frontier posts, but the old ones retained the powers and the semi-independence they had previously gained.

The result was a race of men devoted primarily to their cities; only secondarily to the province or kingdom to which their city belonged and quite incidentally to Spain as a geographical and linguistic unit. Such a racial tendency could not help developing that disregard of large national interests in preference to petty local concerns which has been a most unfortunate trait in the history of the South American Republics. For while it may be true that the conception of the city as the soul of the native country has always been effective from the point of view of the development of civilization, it has been disastrous in its effect on national progress. It was just that loyalty to the municipality that prevented the growth of the Greek Empire.

Another result of the eight centuries of Christian warfare against the infidel Moor was the development of moral and physical qualities that made possible the marvelously rapid conquest of America by small companies of *conquistadores*. Brave, bigoted, courageous, accustomed to continuous hostilities, ardently devoted to a cause for which they were willing to lay down their lives, fighting in the last ditch, it is not surprising that the ancestors of the South Americans were able to achieve such wonderful results in the 16th century.

Only a vigorous and rising nation could have accomplished the great work of exploring, conquering and colonizing America which was done in that century. As a matter of fact, a wonderful transformation did take place in Spain during the latter part of the 15th and the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella united by personal bonds what had formerly been a handful of detached kingdoms.

These countries each had their own laws, their own peculiar customs and separate administrative systems. Some of the provinces were inhabited by people of different stock. The process of unification under Ferdinand and Isabella was almost contemporaneous with the colonization of America. For a career destined to be as great as that of any of the larger empires of history, Spain had at the beginning of the colonizing period an inadequate political organization. Spanish racial unity and religious uniformity were of recent growth. The European progenitors of the Spanish conquerors did not fight for Spain as a whole but rather as citizens of a municipality or as vassals of a petty king. The spirit of a centralized, unified government whose citizens are willing to sacrifice everything for the size of their nation, did not run in the blood of the *conquistadores*. Their ancestors belonged to a fragmentary and embryonic group of nations.

Spain only adopted a policy of centralization a very few years before the acquisition of her American colonies. The effect of such a change in methods of government on popular habits of thought could not be felt for generations. In the meantime, South America was being colonized by men who had no sense of racial unity and few tendencies towards concerted political action.

Hence it is not at all surprising that their descendants, the heroes of the wars of emancipation, did not find it easy or natural to unite under one government. It was in accordance with the history of their race that they should form separate political establishments. It was also in accordance with that Spanish colonial policy which forbade communication between the different colonies and in no way encouraged a community of interests.

Historically then, there was little to cause the South American colonies, on achieving their independence, to unite, even had they not been separated by tremendous natural obstacles.

The founders of the original thirteen English colonies not only inherited racial unity but providentially built their homes on a short strip of sea coast and occupied a homogeneous country, no larger than a single Spanish colony. Their union followed

as a matter of course. It was quite otherwise in South America. For, as though it were not enough that the tendency of the race was towards building up individual communities rather than federations, as though the laws forbidding the colonies from trading with one another and from travelling from one colony to another were not a sufficient preventative of union, all the forces of nature, mountains, rivers, deserts, swamps and even winds combined to promote the isolation of the new republics. The top of the highest mountain in the thirteen English colonies was not half as high as the lowest point in the ranges of lofty mountains that separated the Spanish colonies; nor one-third as high as the Uspallata Pass by which Chile is connected with Argentina.

Although the basins of the Amazon, the La Plata and the Orinoco offered many thousands of miles of navigable highways, the masses of water were too copious and too irregular to be controlled before the era of steam navigation. In the great valleys east of the Andes, the excessive fertility of the soil has produced an enormous area of continuous woodlands, a mass of vegetation that has defied the efforts of centuries to effect clearings and roads. This densely timbered and sparsely inhabited region keeps Venezuela from having any dealings with Bolivia more effectually than if an absolute desert lay between them.

There is nothing that separates one of the United States from another that is at all comparable to the lofty chain of the Andes and the impenetrable jungle that lies for hundreds of miles on the eastern slope of the Cordillera. The more one considers the matter, the more it seems as though nature could not have placed more impassable obstacles in the way of intercommunication if she had set out with that definite purpose in view. In comparison with the difficulties of travelling from Lima, the center of the old Spanish domain, to Buenos Aires, a journey from New York to Charleston in the days of the American revolution was a mere pleasure jaunt and yet it seemed difficult enough at that time. Nowhere in the English colonies existed such impediments to communication as the deserts of northern Chile and southern Peru, the swamps of eastern Colombia and

western Venezuela, the forests of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, or the gigantic chain of the Andes whose lowest point for thousands of miles is at least ten thousand feet above the sea.

It is not for us to criticise the South Americans for having failed to unite and form a great nation. Our ancestors were favored by nature with a region that is comparatively accessible in all parts. It is not any more creditable to the English colonists that they united than it is discreditable to the Latin-Americans that they did not. In both cases, racial characteristics, aided by diverse policies of colonial administration made a foundation for growth which by an extraordinary coincidence, was in every possible way favored by local geographical conditions. The English colonists, on securing their independence, had been acquainted with one another for generations; had fought side by side in the French and Indian wars; had inter-married, built up social and business friendships; united in sending agents to the mother country and in sending representatives to Congresses where the leading men of each colony came to know one another's desires and aspirations. Placed by fate on a narrow strip of coast less in length than the seaboard of Chile alone, enabled by nature to communicate both by sea and land, separated from one another by neither deserts nor lofty mountains, what more likely than that they should have followed their natural traditions and formed a single nation? The difficulties in the way of the South American colonists following such an example were stupendous. Scattered over an enormous area, separated by the greatest natural boundaries that nature has produced, it was scarcely to be expected that they too should not follow the traditions of their race and build up local governments instead of forming a federation.

The historical and geographical reasons that prevented the formation of confederations have also mitigated against the building up of strong national governments. The citizen is still inclined to favor the affairs of his city rather than the good of his country. He finds it easier to be loyal to the local chieftain than to the central government. The cure for this, however, is already in sight. The energy and enterprise of English, French and Ger-

man capitalists are overcoming the obstacles that nature has placed in the way of inter-communication.

In time, aided by steam and electric systems of transportation, some of the southern republics may even unite with others. But before this comes about it may confidently be expected in the near future that the development of new transportation facilities will make possible the growth of strong national feeling and will prevent the states from falling apart. It will certainly make revolutions less frequent and bring a condition of stability that will even attract American capital and greatly augment European immigration.

There are some republics, however, that will never unite of their own accord. Chile and Peru, for example, are continually at swords' points. The obvious reason is that Peru had something of value that Chile wanted, seized, and proposes to keep. But there is something deeper than nitrate fields that lies at the bottom of the trouble. A large part of the hatred that exists between Chilean and Peruvian is due to their native ancestry. In the Chilean there is a large percentage of Araucanian blood. In the Peruvian there is as much of the blood of the Quichuas. The Araucanians are the hereditary foes of the Quichuas. For centuries there was no peace between them. The Incas pushed their army of Quichuas as far south as possible but they never could conquer the lands where the Araucanians roved. Even the all-conquering Spanish soldiers were blocked in southern Chile. It is not necessary to repeat here the long story of the Araucanian wars and the heroic deeds of Lautaro and his kinsmen. Instead of being easily conquered by a handful of Spanish adventurers as were the Incas and Quichuas, the Araucanians kept the Spaniards at bay for centuries, and were in fact never subdued. The Araucanians and the Quichuas had as different racial characteristics as can be imagined. Although the Araucanians did not constitute a nation in the proper sense of the word but were divided into a large number of clans, each independent and recognizing no master, they never allowed any outside people to interfere with their national life. They were intensely independent. Even the chiefs lacked authority in time of peace. There

were no serfs or slaves. More important still, there were no laws; private wrongs had to be settled privately. All of these elements must be taken into consideration when contemplating the character of the Chilean of to-day. His Spanish ancestors brooked no interference and recognized no central government but his Araucanian ancestors were still more intensely fond of individual liberty. His Spanish ancestors were brave and fearless. No better soldiers existed in Europe in the 16th century. His Araucanian ancestors were even more war-like and after their first few defeats by the invaders they successfully assumed the offensive, storming Spanish towns and carrying off cattle and horses. Before long they organized troops of cavalry, learning to excel on an animal that their ancestors had never heard of and which the Quichua even now seldom dares to mount. Although the entire Araucanian nation was less numerous than the army of Quichuas that surrounded Atahualpa when he was successfully attacked by Pizarro, they killed more Spanish soldiers than fell in the conquest of the entire remainder of the continent. With such an ancestry, it is not remarkable that the Chileans are notoriously the best fighters on the continent to-day. Contrast their inheritance with that of the Peruvians. The Quichuas were and are a timid, peaceful folk lacking in dignity, defending themselves rather with cunning and falsehood than by deeds of arms. The servile sentiment is deeply rooted in the Quichua nature. He maintains a sense of loyalty for his former masters but he has absolutely no idea of liberty or independence. The Quichuas had reached a higher state of culture than the Araucanians but their manly characteristics were far less developed. In fact, at the time of the Spanish conquest, they seem to have been already in a decadent condition. With such blood in their veins, it is not surprising that the Peruvians were defeated by the Chileans, their country overrun and humiliated, their valuable nitrate fields seized and the seeds of intense national hatred planted that will take generations to eradicate. It is not too much to say that a voluntary union between Chile and Peru is about the last thing to be expected. Even concerted action is no more to be looked for from them than from France and Germany or any other hereditary foes.

Even apart from such special cases, however, Spanish America has abundant reason to feel that with her racial tendencies and antipathies strengthened by geographical conditions of a remarkably "helpful" character sufficient cause exists for that lack of political cohesion which has characterized her history for the past century.

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